

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 727

asked on 24 June 2022

DR M ROBINSON ASKED THE MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SMALL BUSINESS AND MINISTER FOR TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (HON D FARMER) —

QUESTION:

With reference to the imminent cessation of the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme—

Will the Minister advise if every Sibelco employee affected by the closure of the mine has been afforded an equal opportunity to access all components of the scheme?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question.

I am pleased to advise that the Palaszczuk Government has delivered on its commitment to support workers impacted by the phasing out of sand mining on Minjerribah.

Under the North Stradbroke Island Workers Assistance Scheme (the Scheme), up to \$5 million was available over five-years to 31 May 2021 targeted at eligible Sibelco workers on Minjerribah and the Pinkenba processing plant.

In December 2020, the end date of the Scheme was extended from 31 May 2021 to 30 June 2022. This extension meant that two and a half years of support for workers was provided since the closure of sand mining on Minjerribah.

The assistance package had a broad range of support focused on assisting workers to find and maintain new employment and allow for the ongoing economic viability of the Minjerribah community.

A dedicated Employment Services Manager was employed full-time providing case management services as well as specialised support. The Employment Services Manager has worked over the past six years to ensure affected Sibelco workers were aware of the assistance available to them and to maximise their entitlements under the Scheme.

When introduced in 2016, assistance included job search; training and skills support; housing assistance; commuting subsidy; employer wage subsidy; income supplementation; and dislocation allowance. The value of these elements for an individual ranged from up to \$2,000 for job search and skills training, up to \$5,000 for the commuting subsidy and a one-off \$5,000 payment under housing assistance.

The housing assistance and commuting subsidy elements were only available to Sibelco workers who were island residents. The underlying intent was to encourage island residents to continue to live on Minjerribah, to support their local community and contribute to the island's economy. In the longer term, by remaining on the island they are supporting Minjerribah's transition to a more diverse and sustainable economy.

Positive changes were made to expand the Scheme in 2019 and early 2020 to make it more responsive to the workers' needs. The changes included financial advice and small business mentoring up to the value of \$1000 each; access to job search and training and skills support for eligible partners of Sibelco workers where the worker had not fully expended that funding; and an expansion to the scope of the Scheme enabling workers who commenced employment with Sibelco after the Scheme commenced, to be able to access support. The employer wage subsidy was also increased.

As at 31 May 2022, 184 affected Sibelco workers have been supported under the Scheme, with 166 of these former and current Sibelco employees accessing financial assistance.

The Palaszczuk Government remains committed to helping workers affected by the Sibelco mine closure to pursue new employment opportunities. Workers have been advised they will remain a priority cohort for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) and there is a range of support and assistance available for them to access, subject to eligibility requirements.

I encourage Sibelco workers to maintain contact with DESBT to find out about programs and initiatives which are being delivered through DESBT.